

COVER STORY

by Eric Dickson

FADE IN:

INT. NEWS ROOM - LATE NIGHT

It's after hours. Mostly dark. The room half-lit by overnight auxilliary lights which cast a grim shadow.

The sprawling office area consists of a vast array of lonesome cubicles, xerox machines and drafting tables which dot the unoccupied room.

The lone pitter patter of lightning fast KEYSTROKES are loud and in our ears, as we realize this space is void of human life.

All except for one busy young woman. GILLIAN GREY (25), dark and curly hair, waifish, black wire reading glasses. She sits at her modest desk, types away, chugs coffee.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

And here I am. The last one in the room,
as usual. Two years in and I'm feeling
the futility of my own existence.

Gillian rubs at her neck, stares up at the ceiling in a stupor as she takes a rest.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

They say you have to be just a little
cynical to be in this business. These
days it seems all people care about is
the dark side of human nature.

Gillian chugs some coffee, then right back to it.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

But is that really who we are? Or is it
what we've been programmed to think and
believe about ourselves?

(beat)

Any good editor will tell you that the
secret to successful journalism is
keeping your audience good and angry.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

After all, if the world were a perfect place, things would get pretty boring.

Gillian smiles, rests her tired face in the palm of her hand.

And then --

Our attention is drawn overhead as the LIGHTS COME ON.

The same newsroom, days earlier. The cubicles now filled with writers. Others wait in line at the xerox machine. The rest stand around in a circle, chew on some free donuts.

Gillian walks in. A jansport bag thrown over her shoulder and this morning's edition in hand.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

But lately I've been thinking.

She takes a quick glance at the paper.

INSERT - NEWS ARTICLE

The headline reads: CHOKE HOLD COP NOT GUILTY

BACK TO SCENE

Gillian seems put off by the report.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

Maybe our cynicism is simply a reflection of our own deep and desperate desire to fight back. To get back a country we've lost long ago. To finally have control over our own lives. Our own destiny.

Gillian tosses the paper in a trash bin.

INT. BREAK ROOM - MORNING

Gillian struts in, spots her co workers IAN (30s), shaggy, tired and unshaven and VIOLET (30s), short hair, gum snapper, too much makeup, at a round table. The two are quiet as they pick at a couple of muffins.

GILLIAN
Good morning.

IAN
Is it now?

Ian seems annoyed with Gillian as he spins his mug in a circle and stares blankly at the table.

VIOLET
What're you so chipper about?

Gillian pours herself a mug, watches Ian and Violet closely, with a curious smile.

GILLIAN
I'm not. I'm just saying good morning.
Like I always do.
(beat)
What's with you guys?

Violet, full drama mode, grabs at her beating chest, concerned as she turns to Ian.

VIOLET
She hasn't heard.

Ian throws up a hand, stops Violet.

IAN
None of us have heard anything. Not yet.
So don't say anything, okay?

Gillian joins them at the table.

GILLIAN
What're you guys talking about?

VIOLET
You notice anything different this morning?

Gillian thinks it over.

GILLIAN
No. Not really.

VIOLET

Who's not here? Who's been the first one
in the door for the last ten years?

Gillian thinks it over. A sickened grimace suddenly consumes
her face.

GILLIAN

Randi. Oh my God. What happened?

Ian reaches out a supportive hand to Gillian.

IAN

Calm down. It was a car accident. I'm
sure everything's fine or we would've
heard different.

VIOLET

You don't know that. She could be dead
as far as you know. Maybe Freddy's just
keeping a lid on it until she makes the
official announcement.

IAN

Why do you always do this?

VIOLET

Well, sorry if I appear just a little
concerned. Nobody's bothering to give
us any details. Like, hey, don't worry
gang. She's up and around. She's a
bit beat up but hey...she's not dead.
You know? Stuff like that.

IAN

Well it could be there's nothing to tell.

Gillian, anxious, rubs her arms.

GILLIAN

God, I hope not.

IAN

Freddy's supposed to round up all the
troops at eight thirty. Make the
official announcement.

Gillian, Ian and Violet all stare at a wall clock: 8:20 AM.

INT. NEWS ROOM - DAY

It's a full room as most of the news staff has gathered to hear the bad news about Randi. The chatter amongst them is loud but ceases as FREDDY BAYER (50s), big hair, long legs, sexy but tough, steps through the crowd.

FREDDY

Okay, gang. Everyone here?

The crowd is quiet as a church mouse.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

I'll take that as a yes, so I'll make this quick...

Gillian near the back of the crowd. She nervously rubs her hands together, bites at her bottom lip.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

As some of you have already heard, Miranda Jones was in a car accident sometime late yesterday evening.

Violet plays up the drama as she tears up and the crowd consoles her. Ian simply shakes his head.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

No, she's not dead. Yes, she's alive, but it's not good.

Gillian sneaks her way to the front.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

There was some bleeding internally. Because of the loss of blood, she's fallen into a coma.

And a giant gasp fills the room.

Freddy holds her hand up, quiets them down.

IAN

What happened?

FREDDY

According to the police, Randi was coming around the bend on Falcon's Nest Road a little too hot, lost control and ended up in the river.

(beat)

If it weren't for another driver passing by at the exact moment of the accident, they're saying she'd be dead for sure.

Gillian covers her mouth in shock.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

Apparently, when Randi was pulled from the car, her ribs punctured a lung and caused the bleeding.

Violet lets out a giant gasp as the crowd lay hands on her in comfort.

VIOLET

Oh my God.

FREDDY

The police said if he waited for the ambulance, there was a great chance Randi would have drowned for sure. It was a miracle anyone was even there. So we're thankful for his help.

The crowd all turn and chat amongst themselves. Gillian watches them all with genuine curiosity.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

Now, it's just a matter of time before the inevitable rumor mill starts spinning and when it does, everyone, and I mean everyone will come out of the woodwork asking questions...

Gillian quietly turns to Ian.

GILLIAN

(whispers)

What's she talking about?

IAN

Where have you been? You ever read Randi's stuff? She's practically made enemies with everyone in town.

Gillian nods.

FREDDY

There will be members of the press who will try to dig up dirt and spin this into something it's not. So, until the police say otherwise, this was an accident. Nothing more, nothing less.

Gillian's eyes are busy as they dance back and forth.

INT. NEWS ROOM - GILLIAN'S CUBICLE - DAY

Gillian sits at her computer, scrolls through some old articles written by none other than Miranda "Randi" Jones.

The first titled: BAD COP, NO DONUT! A cartoon cop wraps his hands around the throat of an armed felon as his black bag of money spills out hundred dollar bills.

Gillian minimizes the screen, a second article fills the space: THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE HORNY. A cartoon image of a church pastor, bible in hand, with a busty stripper wrapped around his waist and legs.

She minimizes. A third article fills the screen: TRAGEDY HITS CLOSE TO HOME. A picture of RANDI JONES (35) blonde, pretty, professional, with her arm around TANYA WOOD (16), dark hair, bruised and badly beaten. Tanya is wrapped in a large towel, cold, shaken, as Randi speaks with a UNIFORM COP.

INT. FREDDY'S OFFICE - DAY

Gillian peers through the glass, spots Freddy in a very heated discussion with her assistant editor and right hand man JACK SAWYER (40s), graying, handsome.

Gillian gives a quick KNOCK.

Freddy and Jack ignore her as they continue their discussion. Gillian gives another louder KNOCK.

FREDDY
What??? Come in!

Gillian steps in, papers in hand.

GILLIAN
Am I interrupting?

JACK
Yes.

Jack gives up and squats on the couch. Gillian turns, heads for the door.

FREDDY
What is it, GG?

Gillian hangs out by the door.

GILLIAN
I can come back.

FREDDY
No, for God's sakes, spit it out!

Gillian, hesitant, steps back in.

GILLIAN
Well. I was just thinking. With Miranda out sick, I figured you'd be looking for someone to pick up the workload. You know. Until she comes back. I just wanted you to know that I'd be more than willing to do that.
(beat)
I mean. If you were looking.

FREDDY
What's the matter, GG? Jack here not giving you enough to do?

Gillian checks with Jack on the couch who is still irritated by her intrusion.

JACK

She's not out sick, GG. She's in a coma. And she may not be coming back.

GILLIAN

Yes, sir, I'm aware of that. And it's Gillian. Sir.

Freddy gives her a good once over.

FREDDY

What're you after?

GILLIAN

Nothing.

JACK

Come on, Gillian. You know it's never that simple with you. Just tell us what you want and get on with it.

Gillian flips her hair behind her ears, can't stand still as she fights for the words.

GILLIAN

Well, sir, as you know, I've been working here a little under two years now and...

(nervous)

Well, in that time I've yet to work on anything even resembling a real story. I just feel that...

JACK

And you're not happy? Is that what you're telling us?

Gillian pauses. She feels both Jack and Freddy's eyes on her as she nervously rocks on her heels.

GILLIAN

No, sir. I mean...yes. I'm happy. But like you said, Randi may not be coming back.

JACK

That's right. She may not be.

GILLIAN

Right.

Gillian takes a big breathe.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

Look, I know I'm not exactly your first pick as a replacement, but I'm hungry and I'm willing to pick up the slack the others aren't. All I'm asking for is the chance to help out.

Jack checks with Freddy, who seems impressed.

JACK

Fair enough. Tell you what. We'll talk about it and get back to you.

Jack cracks as big a smile as he can muster. Freddy also cracks a phoney smile.

GILLIAN

Okay.

Gillian also smiles as she dips out. Jack immediately shuts the door behind her as he and Freddy continue their fight.

Gillian watches through the glass. Disappointed. Defeated.

INT. EMPLOYEE CAFETERIA - DAY

Gillian carries her lunch tray to a corner table. A simple side salad and half a sandwich. She spots Jack coming her way, neck tie loose, sleeves rolled up.

He stops at her table, hands rested in his pockets. Some sweat in his armpits, circles under his eyes. Tired.

JACK

Hey, GG. Got a minute?

GILLIAN

Hey.

(beat)

Mister Sawyer, are you okay?

JACK

I'm fine. So, anyways, it's not looking good for Randi. Right now, it's just a waiting game.

Gillian is surprised.

GILLIAN

Oh my God. I'm so sorry.

Jack zones out. He snaps himself out of it.

JACK

So listen. We're gonna need something in print. Kind of like a memorial. Randi's work at the paper. What she meant to us, to the city. That kind of thing.

Gillian waits.

GILLIAN

Okay. And?

JACK

I been talking it over with Freddy and we think you're the man for the job.

Gillian is taken back. A loss for words.

GILLIAN

Wow. This is surprising.

JACK

(irritated)

Look, I thought this is what you wanted. If it's too much for you, I can go with someone else.

GILLIAN

No, no. Of course I'll do it. I'd be honored. I would like that.

JACK

Fine. I'll need something on my desk by tomorrow morning. Whatever else you have on the table, it can wait.

Gillian nods.

GILLIAN
Okay. I'll get right on it.

Jack walks off. Stops. Turns back.

JACK
Oh, and GG? -- Keep it simple.

GILLIAN
Of course.

Jack continues. Gillian cracks an excited grin which quickly turns to utter panic.

EXT. FALCON'S NEST ROAD - DAY

Gillian reaches a bend in the road and spots TWO POLICE ISSUE BRONCOS parked on the soft shoulder. She stares down at the pavement, spots two separate SETS OF TIRE TRACKS burnt into the long stretch of road.

The first set of tracks curve left -- off the road, over the steep hill. A small patch of woods in the horizon.

The second set of tracks are a good fifteen yards in front of the first.

Gillian pulls her car to the soft shoulder.

EXT. WOODS - RIVER - DAY

Gillian quietly steps through the forestry, spots THREE UNIFORM COPS near the river. One of them is taking SNAPSHOTS of the dirt below him.

Gillian pulls out her cell -- points it at the three officers as we see them on the screen.

ON THE CELL

Gillian ZOOMS IN. We watch the three officers stare and point at the dirt around them. The lead investigator motions the cameraman his way.

The cameraman follows his direction. He kneels down and gets a snapshot of something in the dirt.

The lead investigator stares up at Gillian. She quickly humps it back up the hill.

INT. POLICE STATION - SQUAD ROOM - NIGHT

Gillian, pen and pad in hand, follows Chief of Detectives BRAD CHERRY (50s), ponchy, leather skin, ex marine. He tries hard to ignore her, but she's two steps behind.

GILLIAN

All I'm saying is this. There were two sets of tire tracks out there and three of your officers were taking pictures.

Cherry stops at each desk, picks up various papers and other reports from metal baskets.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

Pretty unusual considering the police already ruled it an accident.

Cherry turns to Gillian, matter of factly.

CHERRY

I'm pretty sure your friend didn't mean to drive her car over that ravine. Now, did she?

Gillian scoffs - offended by his response.

GILLIAN

No, I'm sure she didn't. But that still doesn't explain what the cops were doing there taking pictures.

(beat)

Either you can tell me, or I can ask your witness.

Cherry, ready to open his office door, stops, glares at Gillian with irritation.

CHERRY

What's this all about?

GILLIAN

I think whoever pulled Randi from her car left the scene. Before they could be identified. That's how you kept their name from the official report. Because you didn't have one.

Cherry huffs with exhaustion.

CHERRY

What do you want?

GILLIAN

I want the same thing Randi's family wants. The truth. Right now, this is just an accident. Nice and clean. But when she dies, it's manslaughter. There's a lot of people in this town who won't be satisfied until you find the person who drove her over that hill.

Cherry's had enough as he ducks into his office, shuts the door in Gillian's face.

INT. MALL FOOD COURT - DAY

Gillian sits at a table in a more quiet area of the cafeteria as she reviews some printed news articles.

INSERT - NEWS ARTICLE

CHOKER HOLD COP NOT GUILTY

Kevin Dawson, 33, will not be facing charges of second degree murder following a grand jury's decision not to indict...

Gillian sets it aside. Reads another.

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE HORNY

BACK TO SCENE

Gillian looks up, spots her friend HARLEY (20s), police deputy, thin, pale skin, wet behind the ears. He takes a seat across from Gillian, keeps a careful eye on the crowd.

HARLEY

Okay. I'm here. Let's make this quick.

GILLIAN

Relax, Harley. Nobody's watching you.
We're safe.

HARLEY

Everybody's watching, Gill. Always.
Remember that.

GILLIAN

Whatever you say, Harley. Did you bring
them?

Harley is reluctant. He quickly reaches into his jacket and pulls out a manila file. He tries to hide it under the table but Gillian loses patience, snatches it from his hand.

HARLEY

Hey. Careful.

Gillian opens the file right there, on the table. Harley squirms in his chair.

INSERT - PHOTOGRAPHS

Two separate images. Two sets of black tire marks.

BACK TO SCENE

GILLIAN

You get the make and model?

HARLEY

You know, I get the feeling I shouldn't be
doing this.

GILLIAN

It'll pass.

Gillian holds up the second image.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

Now what's the make and model of these
tracks?

Harley quickly snatches them from her hand, rests them flat on the table.

HARLEY

Okay, okay. Just don't get anxious.

GILLIAN

I'm on a deadline here, Harley.

Harley keeps one eye on the crowd - nervous.

HARLEY

Two O Five, Sixty Five R Fifteens.

Gillian jots it down in her notepad.

GILLIAN

What about the footprints?

HARLEY

You know I can't do that. You could've taken these tire pictures yourself. How am I gonna explain you getting pictures of footprints?

Gillian rolls her eyes as she packs her notepad in her purse and stands to leave.

GILLIAN

God. I can't believe I had sex with you.

She storms off. Harley shakes his head with disgust.

HARLEY

You're welcome.

EXT. HOME OF OFFICER KEVIN DAWSON - DAY

Gillian parks her car at a curb a safe distance from the house as Dawson himself walks to his mailbox. OFFICER KEVIN DAWSON (33), short but lean, mean, and all muscle, grabs some bills from inside the box, heads back to the house.

Gillian waits until the coast is clear. She steps out, a large camera around her neck as she quickly crosses the road, onto a residential sidewalk.

Gillian spots Dawson's FORD MUSTANG in the driveway. She keeps a safe distance from the home, stops and ZOOMS IN on the rear tire.

CAMERA POV

She SNAPS four good shots. We never get a good look at the tire make and model.

BACK TO SCENE

Gillian is startled by DAWSON'S GARAGE DOOR as it swings open and Dawson appears, trash can in tow.

Gillian turns away, back up the sidewalk as Dawson can't help but notice this strange woman's erratic behavior.

INT. NEW WORLD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - DAY

Gillian waits in a single chair outside the church chapel as the deacons committee pour out, one at a time. The last one out is head deacon AVERY BROWN (40s), modest jacket and tie, balding, but distinguished.

Gillian smiles politely, waves hello to each, catches eyes with Avery as he's about to head down a hallway.

AVERY

Good afternoon, yound lady.

Gillian jumps from her seat.

GILLIAN

Mister Brown?

AVERY

Yes, I certainly am. What can I do for you?

GILLIAN

A minute of your time?

INT. HALLWAY - NEW WORLD PRESBYTERIAN - DAY

Gillian walks side by side with head deacon Avery as he's already grown uncomfortable with the conversation.

GILLIAN

It just seems unusual that New World would continue to employ Bob Birdsall after all that's happened.

AVERY

After what's allegedly happened, Miss Grey.

GILLIAN

Well. Your assistant pastor was allegedly caught in a motel room with a prostitute. I didn't think that was the kind of thing that draws big Sunday morning crowds.

Avery laughs, shakes his head.

AVERY

So you're looking to do another piece on Robert. Is that it?

GILLIAN

No. Not exactly.

AVERY

So what are you doing here, Miss Grey? Exactly?

GILLIAN

Wondering where Birdsall was about ten thirty yesterday evening.

AVERY

I see. This is about your friend. Your colleague at the paper and her car accident.

GILLIAN

Yeah, well, the police are no longer ruling it an accident. It turns out there was someone else there.

AVERY

And you think Robert drove your friend over that hill?

Gillian follows Avery as he dips into an office.

INT. ASSISTANT PASTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

Avery walks to his desk, loosens his tie, removes his coat and begins rolling up his sleeves.

AVERY

Do you realize how absurd that sounds?

GILLIAN

I didn't think the assistant pastor of the biggest church in Bradford would ever be involved with prostitutes. Yet, I was wrong.

(beat)

I believe anything's possible, Mister Brown. That people are capable of anything.

Avery, in a tired slump, grabs the back of his leather chair and sighs out loud.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

Do I think he had something to do with the accident? No. Personally I don't. But there's people out there who will.

Avery folds and rests his arms on the back of the chair, ponders it all. He forces a phoney smile for Jilian.

AVERY

I wanna tell you what Robert was doing in that motel room, Miss Grey. Once and for all. Off the record.

Gillian takes a seat.

AVERY (CONT'D)

The young woman whom Robert was supposedly having a sexual affair with was a regular at our women's care center. Seven months and counting.

(beat)

And she had been on and off a number of prescription drugs, an alcohol problem. As well as a deep seeded sexual addiction. One that dates back to childhood.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Robert found out she had been sneaking in and out of the shelter and hooking at a local motel. Sometimes for money, sometimes just for a quick hit.

(beat)

Because she was abusing her privelages at the care center, The deacon's committee decided she was no longer welcome.

Gillian is affected by the story. Saddened.

AVERY (CONT'D)

So Robert went and pulled a few hundred dollars from his own checking account, found her at the motel and sat in that room with her for over five hours. Praying, witnessing. Doing everything he could to save that girl's soul before we all read about her imminent demise in your newspaper.

Gillian is now full blown embarassed.

AVERY (CONT'D)

But that kind of thing isn't newsworthy enough. The people who read your filth believe every word of it because they trust you. After all, you're just reporting the news.

Gillian stares at the floor.

AVERY (CONT'D)

Now you come here with these ridiculous ideas of Robert committing murder. Why not? He raped one girl, why not kill another?

GILLIAN

My apologies. I'll let myself out.

Gillian stands to leave.

AVERY

Robert's here because he wants to be. Because this is where his heart is.

AVERY (CONT'D)

You wanna know what he's still doing here,
Miss Grey?

GILLIAN

I'm interested. Yes.

AVERY

He takes that white van outside, drives the
homeless to and from Sunday service.
Afterwards, he treats them to lunch. Prays
with them, for hours. For that, he's paid
a very modest salary by this church.
We don't do it because we have to. We do it
out of respect.

EXT. NEW WORLD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - DAY

Gillian walks out a rear door. Her attention immediately drawn
to FOUR FORD TRANSITS, all flat white, parked side by side.

She walks over, gives the tires of the first van a quick glance
It reads **205/65R15**.

Gillian can't help but notice something different with the tires
of the third van. There are little SILVER STUDS peppered all
over the tread.

Gillian pulls out her cell - takes a quick SNAP.

INT. AUTO SHOP AND TIRE CENTER - DAY

Gillian shows the cell phone shot of the Ford Transit's tires
to a mechanic wiping his oiled hands.

MECHANIC

What? You mean these little silver studs?
Those are aftermarket studs. For traction.

GILLIAN

Traction.

MECHANIC

Yeah. For driving in snow and icy roads.
So your car doesn't slide off the road.

INT. JILIAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Gillian sits at her modest breakfast nook, sips a coffee, reads over a couple of Randi's articles:

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE HORNY

The date of the article is **October 4, 2014**. Gillian flips over the page and reviews the second article:

TRAGEDY HITS CLOSE TO HOME

A large photo of teenager TANYA WOOD at the top of the page. She is badly beaten, bruised. The date of the article is **October 13, 2014**.

Gillian reads a short passage from the article:

GILLIAN (V.O.)

On Friday, September 21, Tanya Wood, sixteen, was reported missing by parents Alan and Lila following Tanya's absence from school.

Gillian skips a few lines:

GILLIAN (V.O.)

Believing that Tanya had been abducted, The Woods were surprised to learn that their pregnant daughter had been a resident of New World Presbyterian's Women's Care Center for weeks following her supposed disappearance...

GILLIAN

Oh my God.

INT. WOMEN'S CARE CENTER - NIGHT

Gillian is handed a cup of coffee by the caretaker LINDA (40s), tired eyes, crows feet, old before her time. Linda is in the middle of doing dishes.

LINDA

Avery told me you'd be coming by sooner or later.

LINDA (CONT'D)

I take it this is about Elise Dobbs.

Linda finishes wiping down some plates.

LINDA (CONT'D)

A little late to be asking now.

GILLIAN

What about Tanya Wood? How does she play into all of it?

Linda slowly figures her out.

LINDA

I see. A couple of girls at the shelter. Bob is caught with one, the other is pregnant. There must be a connection.

GILLIAN

There was certainly a connection back to Miranda Jones. Tanya was dumped on her driveway at one in the morning. I can't help but find it more than coincidental.

LINDA

You've got it all figured out, don't you?

GILLIAN

I'll tell you what it looks like. It looks like Tanya found out about Pastor and Elise and ratted them out to the press. Pastor finds out it was Tanya, beats the hell out of the ungrateful little bitch and dumps her on Randi's property like trash.

LINDA

Tanya was a very troubled girl. She gets pregnant, leaves home without telling her parents about the baby, and comes here begging for a roof over her head. Gives us all a real sob story that she'd been abused by her stepfather. That he was the father of her unborn child.

(beat)

Everyone bought it. Everyone except Elise.

LINDA (CONT'D)

She recognized Tanya, as soon as she walked through the door. She knew her and her boyfriend Ricky.

GILLIAN

Ricky?

LINDA

The baby's real father. But Tanya had us all going for days. Convinced us all she had been raped. Elise knew better.

GILLIAN

Wow. So Elise blew her cover?

LINDA

That's right. As soon as we found out about the boyfriend we knew Tanya had been lying. Only we couldn't prove it. So we contacted Ricky.

GILLIAN

What did he have to say for himself?

LINDA

We told him that we felt it was important he knew about the pregnancy. And we felt that it wasn't right that Tanya was keeping this from him.

Linda stops doing dishes, turns to Gillian as she reflects back on the incident.

LINDA (CONT'D)

He didn't take the news so well. Turned over some furniture on his way out the door.

GILLIAN

Really?

LINDA

To tell you the truth, I thought he was gonna hurt Tanya, right there.

GILLIAN

So what happened?

LINDA

It was maybe two days later, Tanya tells us she decided to put the baby up for adoption.

Linda tears up. Gillian notices.

LINDA (CONT'D)

This was before she had been assaulted, of course. As you probably already know, she had been beaten so badly that...well...the pregnancy was terminated.

Linda wipes her tears with a dish towel.

LINDA (CONT'D)

The funny thing is, everyone is looking at Ricky for Tanya's attack. Everybody just assumes he wanted her to miscarry.

GILLIAN

He didn't?

LINDA

You know what Tanya told us? That she was gonna have an abortion. But Ricky talked her out of it. It was his idea to put the baby up for adoption.

Linda shakes her head, returns to the dishes.

LINDA (CONT'D)

Can you believe it?

GILLIAN

Look. Linda. Do you know of any reason anyone else would wanna hurt Tanya Wood? Or what any of this has to do with Miranda Jones?

LINDA

I wish I knew. I'd like to have a word of my own with whomever was responsible. If you ask me, there's only one person who really knows the truth about that night.

Gillian thinks it over.

LINDA

If I were you, I'd start there.

INT. BIG TOP MOTEL - NIGHT

Gillian at the front desk. A real sketchy looking character with a burly beard and dark eyes behind the counter.

DESK CLERK

So this blonde from The Chronicle shows up here with a tv crew, wanting to know what room Elise was staying in. So I says it's none of your business.

He points to the door.

DESK CLERK (CONT'D)

Take a hike. Only she's not listening and says I can give her the room number or they can go anyways.

GILLIAN

How's that? I thought they didn't know what room she was in.

DESK CLERK

That's what I said. I said how do you know where she is? You gonna bust in every door in my motel? I don't think so.

GILLIAN

And what did she say?

DESK CLERK

She says she knows what room she's in. The bitch was just trying to get my face on the tv camera. Like I was the one pimping her out or something.

GILLIAN

And you weren't?

DESK CLERK

No! All I did was rent her the room. What happens after that is out of my hands.

GILLIAN

So they went to her room and knocked on the door, and then what?

DESK CLERK

Your friend and crew were beating on her door for ten minutes straight with no answer. So this asshole with the microphone kicks in the door and busts my lock.

JILIAN

Ouch. Sorry to hear that.

DESK CLERK

You know, I seen this guy on tv, giving his side. This Pastor Bird dog, or whoever the hell. Tell me this. If he's so innocent, then why the hell did it take ten damn minutes of knocking on the door and he still doesn't answer?

Gillian thinks it all over.

DESK CLERK (CONT'D)

You telling me he's in there taking communion?

GILLIAN

I see your point.

DESK CLERK

You know, I've seen all walks of life come in and out of here and I'll tell you this.

(beat)

This preacher. He's as dirty as the day is long.

INT. FREDDY'S OFFICE - DAY

Gillian paces on the floor, gives her official report to Jack and Freddy who seem less than enthused.

GILLIAN

I know some of this may sound kind of out there, but if you could just keep an open mind.

Jack cracks an insincere smile. Freddy rocks in her recliner as she bites at her reading glasses.

GILLIAN

I know you told me to keep Randi's memorial simple. Which I did. It's done. It's right here.

Gillian places the story on Freddy's desk.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

But I did some digging around yesterday out by Falcon's Nest Road. The cops were there, taking pictures. Not just of tire tracks, but footprints. Of someone who was down at the river with Randi.

Jack smiles, turns to Freddy, who also smiles.

JACK

No kidding?

GILLIAN

Now, this is the same person who pulled her from her car, and...incidentally, the same one who ran Randi's car off the road.

Gillian awaits a response. Jack and Freddy sit like two bumps on a log.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

Think about it. The police wouldn't be snooping around up there if it were just an accident.

Freddy sighs and shifts in her chair. Gillian notices and grows nervous.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

Get this. I had a friend of mine, from inside the department, get a make and size of those tire tracks on the road.

JACK

You did what?

GILLIAN

Two O Five, Sixty Five R Fifteens. And guess who has the exact size tire on their van down at the church?

Jack turns to Freddy, both confused.

JACK

The church?

GILLIAN

Pastor Bob Birdsall. He's still on the payroll. Driving people back and forth to Sunday Service. He even has his own personal van, and not just any van. One with special studs in the tires for driving in the snow.

JACK

You don't say.

GILLIAN

You should've seen it. They had four of these transit vans. They call them shuttles. But only one of them had these studs in the tires.

(beat)

Get this. They say Pastor Bob put them in personally one week prior to Randi's accident.

This raises Freddy's eyebrows.

FREDDY

Wow.

Jack smirks.

JACK

Gillian...

Gillian stops, turns to Jack.

JACK (CONT'D)

She's awake. Late last night. She pulled out of it.

Gillian seems almost disappointed.

GILLIAN

What?

FREDDY

She's alive. Wide awake and fully alert.
Still banged up but should make a full
recovery.

Gillian thinks it over. Jack and Freddy watch her closely.

GILLIAN

This is great. No. This is great. I can
ask her myself. Randi can verify all of it.

JACK

GG, we already talked with her about the
accident. It happened just like they say.

GILLIAN

How do you mean?

JACK

She was coming around the bend a bit too hot,
slid on the ice and ended up in the trees.

Gillian squints, completely lost.

GILLIAN

What about the guy? The one who pulled her
from the car?

FREDDY

Well. My guess is he ran for his life after
hearing Randi's ribs crack like rice krispies.
Figures he'd disappear before the ambulance
gets there. That way he's not responsible if
Randi doesn't pull through.

GILLIAN

No. This isn't right.

FREDDY

I know how you feel, GG. Your gut told you
something else happened up there. As much as
we don't want to admit it, so did ours.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

We were wrong.

Gillian plops herself in a chair. Her face full of confusion and disappointment.

GILLIAN

But...the police...

Jack takes a seat across from her.

JACK

Were just being precautious. Yes, there were some other tracks left on the road. They figured it might be a hit and run. Now we know it wasn't.

Gillian stands, brushes some lint from her slacks, attempts to compose herself.

GILLIAN

Well. I guess that gives Randi and I a lot to talk about.

Freddy gives up as she shares a look of utter despair with Jack. He quickly stands, face to face with Gillian.

JACK

(sternly)

Okay, GG. This ends. Right now.

GILLIAN

What?

JACK

Whatever it is you think you're doing. Randi's accident was just that. Now, it's gonna be awhile before she's on her feet and back to normal. And even longer before we see her back at the paper. The last thing she needs is you snooping around crying conspiracy.

Freddy lays a hand on Jack, signals him to back off. She picks up Gillian's unpublished article from her desk.

FREDDY

It doesn't mean we still don't need a story. A welcome home for Randi. I figure with some editing, we can still run your piece.

Gillian is less than excited.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

It would be a nice gesture. From all of us to Randi. What do you think?

Freddy hands her the papes. Gillian accepts.

GILLIAN

Right. I'll get right on it.

Gillian ducks out. Tail firmly between her legs.

EXT. CHRONICLE PARKING LOT - DUSK

Gillian drags her feet to her car, down and defeated. She hits unlock on her keychain. A beep and some BRIGHT LIGHTS flash from her car. In the backseat, the SHADOW OF A MAN quickly ducks down, out of sight.

GILLIAN

Oh my God. Oh my God, Oh my God.

Gillian slowly walks backward, and then turns. She bumps into a man's chest as we --

CUT TO:

INT. DARK BASEMENT - NIGHT

Gillian is propped down in a wood chair, blindfolded and gagged and bound at the wrists as the bright beam of a FLASHLIGHT hits her face.

A gloved hand removes her gag.

GILLIAN

What is this?! Who are you?!

The same gloved hand removes her blindfold. Gillian stares up at Harley, her cop friend.

Gillian is shocked.

GILLIAN

Harley?

BOSS (O.S.)

Damn, bro. This chick knows you?

Harley points the flashlight at his friend BOSS (30s), big and burly, ponytail. He ducks out of sight.

BOSS

Come on, man!

HARLEY

Cool down, Boss. We got nothing to hide here. She's good people.

Gillian stares at Harley with disgust.

GILLIAN

You have some serious explaining to do.

HARLEY

Yeah, I guess that I do.

WOOD (O.S.)

Enough of this! Just get on with it!

And out of the darkness walks ALAN WOOD (50s), gray hair, simple collared shirt and khakis. Tanya's father.

GILLIAN

What's going on here?

WOOD

Show her.

Harley walks to a large flatscreen television, presses play on a dvd player. A group photo of several young children featured on the screen. In the back is MARGARET BIRDSALL (40s), simple dress, cooking apron. A tall, teenage boy next to her.

HARLEY

This is the New World Presbyterian foster center. Twenty nine years ago. In the back row you'll notice a familiar face.

Harley points at the boy next to Mrs. Birdsall.

HARLEY (CONT'D)
Bob Birdsall. Bobby back then.

Gillian squints. Has trouble focusing.

HARLEY (CONT'D)
The woman next to him is his adoptive mother Margaret Birdsall.

Harley points at a girl in the front row, on one knee.

HARLEY (CONT'D)
Recognize the blonde in the front row?

WOOD
Your friend from the newspaper.

Gillian leans in for a closer look.

GILLIAN
Randi?

HARLEY
She knew the truth. All the way back then. Before he started paying Elise Dobbs for sex and raping Tanya Wood.

GILLIAN
I don't understand. Harley? What is this?

HARLEY
I watched him do it. For years. All those girls, and I was too scared to do anything about it.
(beat)
Well I'm not scared anymore.

GILLIAN
You were there?

WOOD
Over the years, the church did a real good job of paying everyone off. The police. Even your friend Randi.

GILLIAN

What're you saying?

WOOD

My daughter Tanya came to her. For help. She knew that Randi knew the truth. She knew she was someone with a personal stake in exposing Birdsall for the years of abuse he inflicted on those girls.

Wood turns on a cheap lamp as the light illuminates and casts a shadow across his face.

WOOD (CONT'D)

After all, she had a voice. She was the key to taking him down. All she had to do was corroborate Tanya's claims of abuse and expose him.

HARLEY

But instead, she walked. Got paid off like the rest of them.

GILLIAN

No way. I don't believe you.

WOOD

Show her.

Harley presses play. The still shot of the foster center cuts to video footage of Randi Jones meeting with Avery Brown in a children's playground - after hours.

Avery hands her a duffel bag as Randi makes her way back to her truck.

WOOD (CONT'D)

This was three days after Tanya told Randi about her experiences with Birdsall at the church.

GILLIAN

That video doesn't prove anything.

Harley laughs and shakes his head. He walks in a circle as his frustration gets the best of him.

WOOD

Tanya has always had her share of troubles. Her mother and I adopted her when she was very young. She began acting out at a young age, getting involved in the wrong crowds.

GILLIAN

So what?

WOOD

Then her boyfriend gets her pregnant. When she became too scared to tell us about it, she went to Birdsall for counseling.

Harley calms himself. He stares Gillian down, a dead serious look on his face. She is visibly intimidated.

WOOD (CONT'D)

His idea of counseling was paying for her abortion in exchange for sex.

Gillian is sickened as she shuts her eyes.

HARLEY

That's right.

WOOD

When Tanya first told her mother and I about Birdsall and what he did to her, we didn't wanna believe it. So she got angry and left. Took off with no warning.

GILLIAN

And ended up at the care center. Why? Why would she go there? Of all places?

WOOD

She asked some of the other girls about their experiences with Birdsall. She wanted someone. Anyone to back her story. She figured it was good a place as any to start.

HARLEY

But no one did. Because they're a bunch of cowards. All of them.

WOOD

We decided your friend Randi needed some encouraging.

GILLIAN

What? I don't understand.

HARLEY

We showed her that video of her taking a bag of money from Mister Brown. She changed her story real fast.

Gillian figures it out.

GILLIAN

Elise Dobbs. The motel.

Harley smiles, nods.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

Do a story on Birdsall or the video gets released. You blackmailed her.

WOOD

Very good, Miss Grey.

GILLIAN

I can't believe this.

HARLEY

Believe it.

GILLIAN

Tanya. I need to talk to Tanya. Where is she?

WOOD

Safe, Miss Grey. For the first time in her life, she's safe. As for Pastor Birdsall. Well...he won't be hurting any more girls. Not after tonight.

GILLIAN

What did you do?

Wood snaps his fingers at Boss. He grabs Gillian from her chair and escorts her toward the stairs.

GILLIAN

Where are you taking me?

EXT. WOOD FARM - BACKYARD - NIGHT

Wood, Harley, Boss and Gillian step out of a basement double door and into the backyard.

Gillian spots RICKY (18), scrawny, metal head t shirt, Tanya's boyfriend, as he kicks the hell out of a shirtless man in the dirt. The man's hands and feet are duct taped together.

As Gillian gets a closer looks she recognizes the face of PASTOR BOB BIRDSALL (40s), thin build, in shape, youthful.

HARLEY

Get him up!

Ricky stands Birdsall upright. His face bruised, lip bloody as he spots Gillian in the field.

BIRDSALL

Please. Don't listen to anything they say.
No matter what.

Ricky grabs his face.

RICKY

Shut up!

Harley pulls him away.

HARLEY

Knock it off! Not now!

BIRDSALL

They're liars! They're lying, about all
of it!

Boss hands Wood an automatic pistol. Gillian notices.

WOOD

And now, Miss Grey, we've come to what is
known as the moment of reckoning.

Gillian breaks free of Boss's grip.

GILLIAN
You're all crazy.

WOOD
This is what you wanted, Miss Grey! The
truth! Justice for those girls!

Gillian shakes her head in protest.

GILLIAN
No. Not like this.

WOOD
We tried it your way and your friend Randi
let us down. You think catching him in a
motel with a local whore changes anything?

Wood points at Birdsall with disgust.

WOOD (CONT'D)
He's still here! On the outside, ready to
do it again! Take a good look!

BIRDSALL
It's not true, Gillian. Don't listen to it.

Ricky pulls his own gun. Shoves the barrel against Birdsall's
chest - knocks him backward.

RICKY
Shut up, man!

WOOD
What if it were your family? Your sister?
Or maybe a daughter?

Gillian watches Birdsall with a mix of pity and hateful disgust.

WOOD (CONT'D)
Would you let him go? Give him the chance
to do it again, or would you blow his head
off?

GILLIAN
Please. I know what you're feeling. But it
doesn't have to be like this. I can help
you. I can help Tanya.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

(desperate)

Please let me do this for you! I want to!
Tell him to admit what he did! I'll get
it on record and we can take him down!

Wood steps closer to Birdsall.

WOOD

(to Birdsall)

You hear that? She wants to keep you alive.
You better start talking.

RICKY

Tell her what you did to her!

Ricky shoves Birdsall.

RICKY (CONT'D)

Go on, tell her!

WOOD

You tell her right now what you did to my
baby girl and I'll let you live. Consider
this your only chance.

Birdsall looks conflicted as the words don't quite make it to
his mouth. His lips quiver with fear and despair as he stares
down the barrel of Ricky's gun.

BIRDSALL

I gave her the money for an abortion. But
she refused. Said she was gonna tell the
whole church the baby was mine unless I
paid her off.

(angry)

I tried to help and she does this to me!

Ricky smacks him across the face. Harley pushes him off.

HARLEY

Back off!

WOOD

That's not all! What else?!

Birdsall grows more and more nervous at the site of Ricky's gun.

BIRDSALL

I had to do it. She would've talked.

RICKY

Tell her what you did!

Birdsall makes eye contact with Gillian. He is hesitant as he fights for the words.

BIRDSALL

I followed her one night. Picked her up on the side of the road. I wore a disguise so she couldn't see my face. I took her to this...dirt road just down the street.

Birdsall fights to remember. Gillian notices.

HARLEY

What else?!

Birdsall re focuses. He squeezes his eyes closed.

BIRDSALL

And I beat her. And kept beating her. It was like I couldn't stop.

Gillian's eyes well up with tears.

BIRDSALL (CONT'D)

I tied up her legs and feet, made it look like rape. Then I dropped her on the road and left. I...I panicked. I'm so sorry.

Birdsall shakes all over. Tears shoot down his face. He gives Gillian a nasty stare.

BIRDSALL (CONT'D)

(to Gillian)

There. You got your front page story. Now tell them to put their guns down.

Wood points his gun at Birdsall's chest.

POW!

The first bullet strikes him in the shoulder.

Gillian SCREAMS.

Harley, Ricky, Boss all take shots at Birdsall as he's riddled with bullets.

Gillian quickly drops to her knees. Her mouth agape, in shock. She shakes all over, covers her mouth in horror.

Harley, sympathetic, watches Gillian fall apart. She curls up in the dirt like a frightened child. Her eyes never leave Birdsall's limp body.

EXT. DEEP WOODS - NIGHT

Gillian and Wood watch as Ricky and Boss lay Birdsall's body in a deep grave. Harley stands by with a shovel.

WOOD

(to Gillian)

I wanna show you something.

Wood grabs Gillian by the arm, walks her through a thick patch of woods as Ricky and Boss grab a couple shovels, help Harley fill the grave with loose dirt.

Wood and Gillian carefully maneuver their way through obtrusive branches and find a clearing in the trees.

In the valley below...

A RIVER

flows as far as the eye can see.

WOOD

Your friend Randi drove her car right into that river. Almost drowned if it wasn't for that other driver pulling her out at the last minute.

Gillian stares over the cliff at the flowing river below.

WOOD (CONT'D)

Right now, the cops are calling it a bad accident.

WOOD

But thanks to you...the people will finally know the truth.

GILLIAN

I don't understand.

WOOD

Birdsall's mother. She was killed in an accident, not too unlike what happened to your friend Randi. Drove her car off the road and ended up in the lake below.

Gillian steps to the edge, stares down at the water.

WOOD (CONT'D)

But unlike Randi, there wasn't anyone there to save her.

Gillian slowly figures it out.

GILLIAN

It was him. Pastor. He forced Randi off the road.

WOOD

That's why the Pastor couldn't go through with it. He couldn't stand by and watch that poor woman drown like his mother.

(beat)

There was no way he could handle that on his conscience. Not again.

Gillian ponders all of this.

WOOD (CONT'D)

So after he drives Randi off the road, he has a change of heart and pulls her out of the water before her car goes under.

Gillian shakes her head no.

GILLIAN

No. He couldn't have done it. I don't believe you. Even Randi said it was an accident. Why would she lie?

Wood laughs. He steps within inches of Gillian's face.

WOOD

Because she was blackmailing him, Miss Grey. If she comes out against him then Birdsall could've taken her down along with him.

(beat)

It's a no win situation.

Gillian sighs. Rubs her sore temples.

GILLIAN

This is crazy. This is insane.

WOOD

Your friend and colleague has been lying to all of you. Covering for him. Covering up all of it. For a little bit of money.

(beat)

Now it's up to you to make it right.

GILLIAN

Me?

WOOD

Harley tells me you've been working at that paper for almost three years. You've been waiting. For years, for that big story. To make a difference.

Wood's words hit home with Gillian. She stares off into a trance as she lets it all settle in her mind.

WOOD (CONT'D)

Well here we are, Miss Grey. Asking for your help. It's your chance to make a difference. Forget what happened here tonight. Forget what you saw. Whatever happened is because you had no control over it. All that matters now is that people hear the truth.

GILLIAN

And what about Randi?

WOOD

It's possible she hit her head in that car accident. Can't remember what happened, or how she ended up in the river.

Gillian nods in agreement.

WOOD (CONT'D)

But the facts are, someone pulled her from that car. And that someone is still out there. Now you know the truth. If she's smart, she'll back your play and keep her mouth shut.

GILLIAN

You're forgetting one important detail.

Wood waits.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

Birdsall's dead. When the story breaks, everyone will be looking for him.

WOOD

And he'll be long gone. On the road and never to be heard from again. The people will figure he's on the run.

GILLIAN

How do you know I won't turn all of you in?

WOOD

Because you know as well as I do, Miss Grey that Birdsall got what he deserved.

GILLIAN

Some might say that wasn't for you to decide.

Wood scoffs at her. A smug smile.

WOOD

Come on, now. Is that what's newsworthy these days? Turning in the greiving father of a young girl who was raped and left for dead? Is that what you've been waiting to give the public?

Gillian ponders it all.

WOOD

You have an opportunity to break the biggest story this town's ever known. You've got it in a nice little package. Waiting to be delivered.

Gillian cracks a nervous laugh, wipes her tears. She walks away from the edge of the hill.

GILLIAN

I can't believe this.

Wood follows behind Gillian.

WOOD

But it's up to you. You're the one who has to decide if it gets delivered.

Gillian stops, faces him. A sincere look.

WOOD (CONT'D)

Or you can go back to your little desk and forget tonight ever happened. But it did happen, Miss Grey. You can't take it back now. But you can make something good of it. You can make sure this kind of behavior will never be tolerated again.

(beat)

What will it be?

Gillian just stares back at him in silence.

EXT. BUSINESS DISTRICT - SIDEWALK - MORNING

A man in a work suit, coffee in one hand, pulls this morning's edition from a newspaper machine: BIRDSALL BACK UNDER FIRE by Gillian Grey. The front page article features side by side images of BOB BIRDSALL and TANYA WOOD.

The man stuffs the paper under his arm as he walks past the front steps of the COBB COUNTY CHRONICLE.

Up these steps walk a young woman in a tight skirt and her camera crew.

INT. COBB COUNTY CHRONICLE - PR ROOM - MORNING

The large room is full of tv cameras, eager reporters and still photographers.

Standing at a podium and hot mic is Freddy. Sitting at a table next to her are Gillian and Tanya Wood. Gillian smiles for the FLASHING BULBS as Tanya is more camera shy.

FREDDY

Good morning. I've been asked to speak on behalf of Tanya Wood. We ask that you refrain from any questions until after the briefing, and when you do, if you would please address those questions to either myself or to Miss Grey.

Freddy shuffles some index cards on the podium.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

First of all, it is of utmost importance that we not only recognize...but truly understand Miss Wood's motive for being here this morning.

Some more FLASHES hit Freddy's face as she reviews her talking points.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

She is here today not to pass judgement, or to point fingers, but to admit her own wrongs...

INT. NEWS ROOM - MORNING

Everyone crowds around the water cooler as the chatter and gossip is loud and distorted.

Gillian walks in, jansport over her shoulder.

The crowd all turn and applaud. Violet and Ian whistle as the applause grows louder and louder.

Gillian blushes, flips back her hair. Violet gives her a giant bear hug as the crowd slowly disperses.

Violet lets go, playfully keeps a hold of Gillian's arms.

VIOLET

You finally did it, GG. You pushed us all out of a job, ya little bitch.

Ian rolls his eyes.

IAN

She means congratulations.

Gillian cracks a half-hearted grin.

GILLIAN

Yeah, I know.
(to Violet)
Thank you. Really.

Gillian quietly walks off. Standoffish. Ian and Violet don't get it and share a befuddled look.

IAN

GG?

She stops, turns back.

GILLIAN

Yeah?

Ian walks closer, tries to read Gillian.

IAN

I can't help but notice you had a big weekend.

(beat)

Your face is all over the tv. This is national news. It's huge.

Gillian checks with Violet who looks equally confused.

IAN (CONT'D)

Don't you wanna talk about this?

GILLIAN

Of course. Sorry. It's just that...Freddy wanted to see me right away. I sort of... have to go.

Ian checks with Violet. She shrugs her shoulders.

VIOLET

Let her go, Ian. I guess Freddy wants to show her to her new office.

IAN

Yeah, I guess so.

GILLIAN

Catch you guys at lunch?

VIOLET

I don't know, GG. We need a reservation?

Ian motions for her to back off.

IAN

Looking forward to it.

Gillian smiles, goes about her day. Ian watches her closely.

INT. FREDDY'S OFFICE - DAY

Gillian knocks and enters. She is surprised to see Deputy Brad Cherry waiting in a chair. Freddy behind her desk and Jack pacing on the floor as usual.

GILLIAN

Hi, guys. Wanted to see me?

FREDDY

Gillian. Of course. Come on in.

Gillian catches eyes with Cherry who is less than impressed. She shuts the door.

FREDDY

Gillian here's had quite the morning.

CHERRY

Yes. That's what I hear.

(to Gillian)

Congratulations.

Gillian cracks a nervous grin.

GILLIAN

It was nothing. Tanya's the brave one.
Coming forward like that.

Jack's smile is ear to ear. He gives Gillian a supportive swat on the back with this morning's edition.

JACK

She's modest too.

CHERRY

Don't be too modest. From what I hear, it
it weren't for you finding Birdsall's tire
tracks all over the road, she would've
never talked.

GILLIAN

I'm not so sure about that. She just needed
a push.

CHERRY

Apparently, so did we. I suppose I have
Harley to thank for that.

GILLIAN

I hope you're not too hard on him. He was
just trying to help.

CHERRY

(to Freddy)

You see, Miss Grey came to me for help a
few days back. Guess she had a hunch
about the preacher.

(to Gillian)

I don't like admitting when I'm wrong, but
...nice job.

Gillian smiles.

GILLIAN

Like I said. It was nothing.

CHERRY

Man. This preacher really turned out to be
a piece of work. Paying one girl for sex.
Then pays another to keep her mouth shut.

Cherry shakes his head.

CHERRY

Then beats her within an inch of her life,
taking the life of the baby inside her.

(beat)

And this guy runs a care center for women
no less.

FREDDY

Sickening, isn't it?

CHERRY

Sixteen years old. Hard to believe a girl
like that, at that age, could come up with
a plan like that.

(to Gillian)

How much you say she took the church for?

Gillian fights to remember. Freddy and Jack take notice.

GILLIAN

Fifty. Fifty thousand.

Cherry can hardly believe it. A sickened look about him.

CHERRY

Geesh. Unbelievable. One thing's for sure,
if this preacher was as innocent as he
claims he was with the Dobbs woman, he
would've never paid up.

(beat)

I mean...I wouldn't if I were him. Unless
of course I was guilty.

FREDDY

We got him. We finally got the great Pastor
Bob Birdsall.

Freddy winks at Jack. Gillian looks uneasy.

JACK

Please tell us you got a lead on this
scumbag.

Cherry shoots a hard glance at Gillian who quickly looks away.

CHERRY

Well, not exactly. Other than the fact his wife hasn't seen him since yesterday afternoon and he's disappeared without a trace..

Jack scoffs.

JACK

(to Freddy)

Not exactly the actions of an innocent man.

Freddy smiles, winks at Gillian.

CHERRY

Freddy. Jack. You think I could have a moment with Miss Grey? Go over a couple things for the official report.

FREDDY

Of course. Take your time.

Freddy and Jack head for the door.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

GG. Come get me when you're done.

GILLIAN

Of course.

Jack smiles for Gillian. An official recognition of her as he shuts the door behind him.

CHERRY

I didn't wanna say anything in front of your bosses. I know in your line of work, every detail matters. As it does in mine.

Cherry stands, hands Gillian a color photo of a pair of footprints.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

You were right about those footprints by the river. As you can see those belong to a rather large gentleman. Those are size twelves. Looks like snow boots.

CHERRY

Your Pastor Birdsall was a size nine and a half.

Gillian is shocked.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

Miss Grey, what would you say if I told you Bob Birdsall had a solid alibi for that night?

Gillian can't respond. But she doesn't waiver as she stares dead at Cherry. Unflinching.

GILLIAN

I would say nice try, Deputy.

Cherry smiles, ducks his head down in shame.

CHERRY

You got me.

Gillian folds her arms, smiles, a bit more confident.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

Don't get me wrong, Miss Grey. From all other accounts, Birdsall's as guilty as they come. But I need to get all the facts straight. Before, and not after we drag Bob Birdsall into a courtroom. If you get my meaning.

Gillian nods in agreement.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

You see these kinds of things are important in my line of work.

GILLIAN

I understand.

Cherry smiles.

CHERRY

Good. I guess we're all done here.

Cherry heads for the door, stops, turns back.

CHERRY

You can keep that photo.

He heads out. Gillian exhales in relief.

INT. COBB COUNTY CHRONICLE - LADIES ROOM - DAY

Gillian rushes in, pushes a woman out of her way and charges one of the stall doors.

BAM!

As it slams open.

Gillian ducks her head inside and PUKES HER GUTS OUT.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

Deputy Cherry was right. There were some serious pieces missing from my story. Questions that still needed answered.

Gillian wipes her mouth clean. She slowly stands, attempts to pull herself together.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

Because the people will be looking to me to fill in the blanks, the pressure of responsibility had become even greater.

Gillian stares at herself in the mirror, fixes her hair and forces a fake smile.

INT. GILLIAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Gillian curled up on her couch, stares obsessively at the photo of footprints in the mud. A pair of very large feet.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

So what those footprints didn't match. Maybe Pastor wasn't working alone that night. It could be he had help. It was the only explanation I was willing to accept.

Gillian sets the photos down, shuts her eyes and rubs her sore temples.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

After all, I was there. I watched him confess the whole thing. Every little detail. Who was this cop to question Birdsall's guilt?

Gillian's eyes open as a thought hits her hard.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

The more I thought about it...the more I realized that there was only one person who knew the truth. And I had to find her. Fast.

EXT. NEW WORLD WOMEN'S CARE CENTER - DAY

Gillian keeps a safe distance from the large three story home as she parks against a curb. She grabs a pair of binoculars and watches the property.

BINOCULARS POV

On a WHITE FORD TRANSIT VAN parked near the front door. Gillian spots the SILVER STUDS on the rear tire.

The binoculars follow Gillian's look to the front door as AVERY BROWN and wife LINDA BROWN step out. Avery and Linda both wear black SNOW BOOTS.

BACK TO SCENE

Gillian lowers the binoculars as the white van drives off, down the street.

Gillian spots a young WOMAN with a dog watching her closely from a children's playground. She keeps one eye on Gillian and one on the kids at play, on the swings, monkey bars, etc.

Gillian steps out, briskly walks toward the playground.

GILLIAN

Excuse me!

The woman turns to Gillian.

WOMAN

Can I help you?

GILLIAN

I was looking for Mister Brown. Avery Brown.

WOMAN

You just missed him.

GILLIAN

So that was him in that white van. Guess I wasn't sure.

The woman scans Gillian up and down, sizes her up with a look of distrust.

WOMAN

If you had a message for him, I'll see that he gets it.

GILLIAN

Maybe you can help me. Does he always drive that van? Don't remember seeing it before.

The woman laughs, feeds a snack to her dog.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

I say something funny?

WOMAN

What's the matter, Miss Grey, are you having second thoughts?

GILLIAN

Excuse me?

WOMAN

I read your story. Everyone in town has. You're a real celebrity now.

GILLIAN

Not really. Just doing my job, just like everyone else.

Gillian steps closer, a bit more personal.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

If you have any ideas on how I can do that better, I'd be open to suggestions.

WOMAN

What're you doing here, Miss Grey?

GILLIAN

I'm sensing some hostility. Have I done something to offend you?

The woman isn't sure at first but comes around.

WOMAN

I've worked here for five years. At foster care and the women's center. I help the girls reconnect with family, find work, housing. I've seen it all, Miss Grey.

Gillian hangs on every word.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

I've seen some good ones and I've seen some bad ones. Real head cases. Rotten to their very core. Those are the ones you can't trust.

GILLIAN

Or maybe they're just used to being left out in the cold and need a break.

WOMAN

That's what some of them want you to think. Believe me, I know. There's always a different story. Always playing the victim. All they know is the hustle. It's how they live. How they survive.

Gillian thinks it all over.

WOMAN (CONT'D)

Those two girls played you too, only you're too blind to know it.

GILLIAN

What're you talking about?

WOMAN

Oh. So now you want the truth? Sorry. I can't help you.

The woman walks off.

GILLIAN

Thank you. You've given me a lot to think about.

The woman waves goodbye. Gillian gives up, goes back to her car.

EXT. HAPPY HOUR BAR - NIGHT

Gillian sits in her car, keeps an eye on the front of the bar as a young woman stumbles out, smoke in hand, drunk off her ass.

ELISE DOBBS (20s), tall, beautiful, but strung out with unkempt hair, begins across the lot on foot.

Gillian steps out, hurries toward her.

GILLIAN

Elise Dobbs!

Elise stops, slowly turns. She smiles, a drunken laugh.

ELISE

Well, well. Lois Lane.

Gillian cracks a nervous grin. Elise takes a drag from her smoke.

ELISE

Gee. How'd you track me down?

GILLIAN

Do you have a minute? I'd like to talk with you if I could.

ELISE

Don't know. My schedule's pretty tight. So many places to be, people to see.

Gillian pulls about fifty or so bucks from her pocket.

GILLIAN

Please. It's all I have on me. Just a few minutes. It's important.

Elise smiles, nods in agreement.

EXT. DRIVE IN DINER - NIGHT

Gillian hovers over Elise who is squated in the backseat and chewing what's left of her cheeseburger.

ELISE

I knew I'd see you sooner or later. What took you so long?

GILLIAN

Guess I've been busy.

Elise laughs.

ELISE

Yeah, I heard. But you're here now, so I'm guessing that cop Cherry came to see you too. Am I right?

GILLIAN

He did. What did you tell him?

Elise scoffs.

ELISE

You think I'm gonna talk to the cops? After how they treated me. After they took that bastard's side over mine. Now all the sudden they get curious. Because it's newsworthy. They get to see their names in your newspaper.

Elise laughs.

GILLIAN

Well I'm here. And I wanna hear all about it.

Elise isn't buying it.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

If you're worried about the cops, don't be. When it comes down to it, you'll be protected.

ELISE

Yeah, I bet.

GILLIAN

You're a protected source. Nobody but us has to know we had this conversation.

Elise sparks up a fresh smoke, thinks it over.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

It's the law. I promise.

ELISE

I told everyone about what was happening. The girls, Miss Brown. All of them.

Elise takes another nervous drag. Gillian notices an uneasiness about her.

ELISE (CONT'D)

About the promises he was making, money he was gonna give me...

Elise laughs with disgust.

ELISE (CONT'D)

At first, it was just a little cash here, a little there. Just enough to keep me interested. He'd pay visits to the shelter, offer to take me out to the old stomping grounds to get a taste of whatever I was after. A couple hits here and there just to keep me quiet.

(beat)

Before you know it, he didn't have to come to the shelter. I was coming to him.

A sadness comes over Gillian.

ELISE (CONT'D)

He tells me if I wanted his help... then I had to prove my loyalty.

Elise tears up.

ELISE (CONT'D)

You can fill in the blanks.

GILLIAN

Go on.

ELISE

Nobody believed it of course. Even the other girls. Accused me of making it up. So they kicked me out of there. Back to the streets, no money, no prospects. Have a nice life.

GILLIAN

He was abusing the others too. Wasn't he? Only they didn't wanna talk because he was their meal ticket.

ELISE

So I told my homegirl about everything that was going on at the church. About what he did to me. So she comes up with this plan. To finally catch him in the act.

GILLIAN

This is Tanya?

ELISE

She goes to the shelter, telling everybody her stepdaddy got her pregnant. Crying abuse and begging for a place to stay.

(beat)

So she goes to him...begs him for money to get an abortion. Offers him a little piece on the side.

(laughs)

The asshole goes for it. Just like that.

Gillian shuts her eyes to it. A sick look about her.

ELISE (CONT'D)

She catches him on a tape recorder. Their whole conversation. Busted.

GILLIAN

Oh my God.

ELISE

Between Tanya and her old man, they took the church for thousands. Hush money. Pay up or this tape ends up on the six o clock news.

ELISE (CONT'D)

Funny thing. She plays like she's trying to help me. I never saw a dime of that money. Not one dime.

(beat)

Once her old man got involved, that was it. I was out of the picture.

GILLIAN

You must've been pretty upset.

ELISE

I called and called. Trying to get her to pick up. Nothing.

Elise grows more and more angry, puffs away at her smoke.

GILLIAN

What did you do, Elise?

Elise calms herself and smiles.

ELISE

So I called up your friend. The reporter. I knew she got wet over these kinds of stories so I figured I'd give her one.

GILLIAN

You and Pastor at the motel.

ELISE

I figured if I can't make any cash off of this, someone was gonna talk. Tell every body what was going on down at that church.

GILLIAN

What happened?

ELISE

I call Pastor up. Tell him I was thinking about killing myself. And that I needed someone to talk to. So I gave him the room number and waited.

GILLIAN

And then you called Randi with the cameras.

ELISE

That's right. Two can play at that game
bitch.

Elise laughs. Gillian in deep thought.

GILLIAN

That's how she knew.

ELISE

How who knew what?

GILLIAN

Randi. She knew Tanya was blackmailing him
and kept it from her story. She finally
sees a chance to get even and runs with
it.

ELISE

What do you mean, get even?

GILLIAN

I mean Pastor was abusing her too. Almost
thirty years ago. At the foster center.
The same story. Nobody came forward and
it all got swept under the rug.

Gillian laughs nervously as she's finally cracked the story.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

Very sneaky, Randi. Very sneaky.

ELISE

Wait. The Pastor? Hell are you talking
about, The Pastor?

Gillian is confused.

GILLIAN

What?

Elise watches her closely with a befuddled grin. She breaks
out laughing.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

What the hell's so funny?

ELISE

Wow. You still got no idea about what's going on around you, do you, newspaper girl?

Gillian steps closer, in her face.

GILLIAN

No, I guess maybe I don't. Educate me.

Elise stops laughing, stomps out her smoke.

ELISE

It was him. That motherfucker.

EXT. AVERY BROWN'S HOME - NIGHT

Gillian pulls up at the end of a long dirt road. A beautiful two story home in the distance. She stares through the forestry and spots a WHITE VAN in the driveway.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

Thanks to Elise, I put together some major pieces of the puzzle. It had all come together, nice and neat. Elise, Tanya, Randi. I had everything I needed.

Gillian quietly steps out, begins up the dirt road on foot.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

But I couldn't escape the feeling Deputy Cherry knew more than I did. That this had become a race and I would always be three steps behind...

Gillian approaches some trees, peeks through the brush at the home in the near distance.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

For me, there was only one piece still missing. If I could only find it first there was still a chance I could right a wrong. That I could clear Pastor's name and bring peace to his family.

(beat)

After all. It was the least I could do.

Gillian spots a utility room on the other side of an arched driveway. She runs over, quietly but quickly.

UTILITY ROOM

Gillian slowly turns the doorknob and steps inside.

INT. UTILITY ROOM

Gillian has some trouble seeing, bumps into a long chain and flicks on a light bulb. The room grows bright as Gillian takes a quick look around.

A washing machine and dryer.

Some fishing rods against the wall.

Two baskets of dirty laundry.

Two pairs of wet SNOW BOOTS.

Gillian reaches for the bigger pair of boots, picks one up as it is still very wet from the melted snow. It is a very large shoe fitted for a large man.

INSERT - SNOW BOOT

Gillian turns it over. It is SIZE 11.

BACK TO SCENE

GILLIAN

I got you.

Gillian grabs the other shoe, shuts off the light bulb and ducks out of the room.

EXT. UTILITY ROOM - NIGHT

Gillian runs into Deputy Cherry's chest. She SCREAMS and drops the shoes on the driveway.

EXT. AVERY BROWN HOME - FRONT LAWN - NIGHT

Gillian leans against Cherry's squad car as Avery Brown and the deputy talk in the driveway.

The two finish up as Avery heads inside and Cherry heads for his car. Avery and Gillian exchange looks.

Cherry sports a sly smirk on his face as Gillian fights the urge to look him in the eye.

CHERRY

I could write you a citation for trespassing
but Mister Brown's agreed to let it go.

Gillian smirks.

GILLIAN

Yeah, I bet he has.

CHERRY

You know what's funny? Here you are, digging
around his property. He was more interested
in what I was doing here.

Gillian finally acknowledges him.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

If you're worried about those boots, there in
the car.

Gillian spots Avery watch them both from his front window. He ducks away.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

Meantime...me and you have some catching up
to do down at the station.

Cherry points to the passenger door as Gillian rolls her eyes and walks around the car.

INT. CHERRY'S OFFICE - POLICE STATION - NIGHT

Cherry sips on a cold beer and paces the room as Gillian sits in a chair and watches him.

CHERRY

Let me get this straight. Your friend Randi
not only knew about all this...but she's
involved too? That what you're telling me?

GILLIAN
I know it's hard to believe.

Cherry scoffs.

CHERRY
Yeah.

GILLIAN
But it's the truth.

CHERRY
Right. You were pretty sure the last time
when you came forward with Tanya Wood.
And now you're changing your story.

GILLIAN
I screwed up! Is that what you wanna hear?!

Cherry smiles, folds his arms, watches her.

GILLIAN
That I was wrong and you were right?! Fine!

CHERRY
You see, that's how we're different, you and
me. You think this is a game. This is real
life. With real people. Real lives that
you're playing with.

GILLIAN
I understand that.

CHERRY
Do you now? You wanna tell that to Robert
Birdsall's family? They're a bit confused
about a lot of things. Now he's up and
disappeared without so much as a phone call
and I don't have the first damn clue what
it is I'm supposed to be telling these
people.

GILLIAN
You can tell them the truth. That I screwed
up. That I trusted the word of a troubled
teenage girl over his and that I was wrong.

Cherry smiles and shakes his head as he paces the room and keeps one eye on Gillian.

CHERRY

Okay, fine. I'll bite. Who's your source? I'm gonna need to have a little talk with this person. Get all our stories straight this time.

Gillian stares at the floor. Cherry stops, waits.

GILLIAN

I can't tell you that?

Cherry's eyes twitch and squint. Totally taken back.

CHERRY

Excuse me?

GILLIAN

I told her I'd keep her out of it.

Cherry laughs.

CHERRY

Of course! But you don't have any trouble throwing your friend Randi Jones under the bus! Do you?!

Gillian stands up, offended, angry.

GILLIAN

That's different!

CHERRY

How?!

GILLIAN

Because she had a responsibility to tell the truth and she buried it!

CHERRY

And how are you sure this one's telling the truth?!

Gillian once again stares at the floor.

CHERRY

No, no. Don't tell me! You have a hunch!
Is that it?!

GILLIAN

Look, all you have to do is get a match with those boots and you can put Avery Brown at the scene.

CHERRY

So what if I do? Maybe he was. Maybe the whole thing was an accident. Maybe Randi Jones didn't say anything because she knows it was an accident when he saved her life and pulled her from that fucking car!

Gillian laughs and shakes her head.

GILLIAN

We're wasting time.

CHERRY

Okay, Detective! You tell me! What's next on the agenda?! Tell me what the missing piece of the puzzle is!

GILLIAN

We need to talk to Tanya Wood.

CHERRY

Yeah, cos we all know she's a reliable source!

GILLIAN

Will you shut up and just listen to me for a minute?!

Cherry throws up his hands in defeat and folds his arms.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

My source says that Tanya has a recording of Avery Brown's voice. Their whole arrangement recorded on tape. If we find her, we can get the tape.

Cherry is intrigued at the thought. He slowly rests on the edge of his desk.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

That along with proof that Avery Brown drove Randi into the river and you've got her!

Cherry smiles.

CHERRY

You said her.

GILLIAN

Yeah, well I meant him.

CHERRY

I just figured it out.

GILLIAN

What?

CHERRY

You.

Gillian nervously strokes her hair, backs away from Cherry.

GILLIAN

How do you mean?

CHERRY

It isn't Brown you want. It's her. It's Randi.

Gillian looks ashamed. She changes the subject.

GILLIAN

So what now?

CHERRY

I want a full report from you and your source. Every detail. If her friend Tanya gives us something similar and corroborates the story then we've got our man.

GILLIAN

You got it.

CHERRY

In the meantime, keep quiet. Nobody but us knows about this.

CHERRY

The last thing we wanna do is scare off
Tanya Wood before we get the chance to
talk to her.

Gillian sighs out loud, conflicted.

CHERRY (CONT'D)

What is it?

GILLIAN

Now all we have to do is get her to talk.
How on earth are we gonna do that?

CHERRY

You leave that part up to me.

INT. GILLIAN'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

The room is dark. Gillian asleep on the couch covered only in a
simple t shirt. Her hair down, glasses off, attractive.

A loud KNOCK at the door awakens her. She rubs at her tired eyes
and jumps up, heads for the door.

She opens and is surprised to see Jack Sawyer on the other side
who is taken back by Gillian's skimpy shirt.

JACK

GG. Did I wake you?

Gillian's eyes half shut.

GILLIAN

Me? No, no. I was just...

JACK

Sleeping?

GILLIAN

Yeah.

JACK

I know it's late but we should talk.

Gillian is hesitant.

GILLIAN
Okay. Yeah. Come in.

Gillian yawns as she heads for the fridge. Jack takes a quick glance at her back side.

Gillian grabs a can of soda, hands it to Jack.

JACK
This won't take long.

Gillian nervously flips back her hair.

GILLIAN
Everything okay?

JACK
I don't know, GG. You tell me. You've been acting pretty strange lately.
(beat)
Any reason?

Gillian avoids eye contact as she heads back to the fridge and grabs her own soda.

GILLIAN
I'm tired I suppose. Things haven't exactly been easy for me at work lately. Fitting in with all the big kids. Convincing the others I belong.

She cracks open her soda.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)
I guess it gets a bit tiring after awhile. Not that anyone notices.

Gillian takes a belt of her drink.

JACK
I notice you Gillian. I wouldn't be here if I didn't.

GILLIAN
But not as much as Randi, right?

JACK

She's been at that paper for a lot longer than you, Gillian. It's nothing personal. It's just seniority.

GILLIAN

And it doesn't hurt that she's sharing a bed with you. Does it?

Jack is shocked. A nervous chuckle.

JACK

Well. So much for keeping things quiet.

GILLIAN

Everyone knows, Jack.

(offended)

Boy, you really do think I'm stupid.

Jack moves closer to her.

JACK

I don't think you're stupid, GG. Far from it.

Gillian reads his eyes.

GILLIAN

Really?

JACK

Really.

Gillian smiles, takes a seat on the counter top, legs open as she rests the can in her lap.

Jack tries real hard not to look.

GILLIAN

And now that Randi's out of the picture you're here to what?

(beat)

Break in the new girl?

JACK

What're you talking about?

GILLIAN

You think I don't know what you're after?
What you're all about, Jack? I've been
watching you. The two of you.

JACK

Is that right?

GILLIAN

All of us can see it. Randi saw it. And
she ran with it. Why not? She's a big
girl. You two had an arrangement and it
worked.

JACK

You're wrong.

GILLIAN

Oh really?

JACK

Really.

Gillian slowly raises the can to her mouth, takes a really big
chug of her drink. Jack is visibly uncomfortable as he looks
away.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

She gets to run her stories and you get
to fuck her. Everybody wins.

JACK

(angry)

Watch your mouth.

GILLIAN

I've been here six months and you've never
once been inside this apartment. And now
here you are. The middle of the night.

JACK

Knock it off, GG.

GILLIAN

We both know why you're here so let's just
get it over with.

Jack laughs and shakes his head. Angry, yet he can't force his legs to move for the door. Gillian takes off her shirt.

GILLIAN
(a childlike voice)
Okay, Mister Sawyer. I'm ready to take dictation.

Jack, furious, grabs Gillian's shirt and throws it back in her face. Gillian, still smiling, covers herself.

JACK
I don't think so, GG. I don't feel like being your next story. But nice try though.

Jack heads for the door.

GILLIAN
You're on your way out! Both of you!
Everyone's gonna know the truth!

Jack stops. Gillian hops off the counter.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)
How much did you and Randi take him for?
A couple hundred thousand?

JACK
What in the hell are you even talking about now, GG?

GILLIAN
Don't do that! You tell me the truth!

Jack stares her up and down.

JACK
I'm gonna forget tonight ever happened.
This whole conversation. All of it.

Gillian is heaving with anger.

JACK (CONT'D)
And I'm gonna give you one more chance to come clean with me.

JACK (CONT'D)

Tell me what the hell's going on between you and Tanya Wood. You tell me right now and I can maybe see about saving your job.

Gillian is surprised by this.

JACK (CONT'D)

You don't think Freddy knows you're full of shit? She knew the second that cop Brad Cherry showed up asking questions.

Gillian tears up.

GILLIAN

Get out.

JACK

You sure that's how you wanna play this, GG? Cos things can get a lot worse for you.

GILLIAN

Get out!

Jack stares her down but she looks away, to the floor, hiding and ashamed of herself.

Jack heads out.

INT. NEWS ROOM - GILLIAN'S DESK - MORNING

Gillian sits at her desktop. A blank screen and a cursor. Her morning coffee untouched.

Jack passes by, gives her a cold hard stare. She ignores him and reaches for her coffee - spills it all over her paperwork and other supplies.

GILLIAN

Dammit!

Her desk PHONE RINGS. She picks up.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)

Yeah? Gillian here.

Gillian listens.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)
Yeah, Freddy. Of Course.

She hangs up.

GILLIAN (CONT'D)
Shhhhit.

INT. FREDDY'S OFFICE - MORNING

Gillian approaches the office. She takes a second and sucks in a giant breath. She knocks and enters. Freddy gazes out her window in a silent stupor.

Gillian clears her throat. Freddy keeps her eyes toward the glass and sips her coffee.

FREDDY
GG, did you know The Chronicle has never once printed a retraction in their Sunday morning edition?

Gillian rolls her eyes.

GILLIAN
No. Can't say that I knew that.

FREDDY
I've been in the business for twenty seven years. The last five with The Chronicle. Can you imagine what it would personally do to my career if I were held responsible for printing something that wasn't entirely accurate?

GILLIAN
No, I don't.

Freddy turns to Gillian. Dead serious.

FREDDY
Well I do. It would be the end of it.

Gillian nods.

Freddy walks closer to Gillian. Slow and methodical as to add to the intimidation factor.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

Although there are certain circumstances that we may not have any control over. Like a bad source. You're told something that holds about ninety percent truth. And, in your haste to nab the story, you run with it. Before all the facts are in.

Gillian cracks a nervous smile.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

Some might call that bad luck. I call it bad reporting. I call it incompetence.

Gillian hangs her head low.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

I hear you and Jack had a bit of a heated conversation last night.

GILLIAN

Yes. More like a misunderstanding.

FREDDY

I see. Anything I should be made aware of?

GILLIAN

It's nothing. Really. Honestly, nothing to be concerned about.

FREDDY

Whatever it is you two are fueding about, I'd appreciate it if you took care of it.

GILLIAN

Of course.

Gillian heads for the door.

FREDDY

GG?

Gillian stops.

FREDDY

When I say take care of it, I mean right away. As in the next twenty four hours. Or I'd suggest looking for a new job.

Gillian nods in agreement. She heads out, tail between her legs. Freddy is all smiles as she watches her drag down the hall.

INT. DRAINAGE PIPE - AFTERNOON

Tanya Wood smokes a cigarette, paces up and down the dark drain pipe as if she's waiting on someone.

Elise ducks down a hill, steps inside the tight space as her and Tanya catch eyes.

TANYA

Okay, I'm here. What is it? I told you we shouldn't be seen together like this.

ELISE

Yeah, I bet.

Tanya gives her the stink eye.

TANYA

What's your problem?

Elise gets in her face.

ELISE

You know what the hell my problem is, bitch, I want my cut.

Tanya backs up a space. A bit scared of the bigger girl.

TANYA

I can't. Not yet. Ever since dad found the money, he's been calling the shots. Avery deals with him direct. He doesn't want me anywhere near that church. Not with the cops out asking questions and shit.

ELISE

I'm telling you right now. I want my end. If you don't, I'm going to the cops and telling them everything.

ELISE

About you and Brown, the money, all of it.

TANYA

You stupid bitch. Do you even know what you're saying?

ELISE

You got until the end of the day. Keep your phone on.

Elise heads up the tube with attitude. Tanya shakes with anger but too scared to confront her head on.

TANYA

Think about what you're doing!

ELISE

Get my money!

Elise heads on.

TANYA

You talk to the cops and they find out we lied about Pastor, you'll be in jail with the rest of us! You'll never see that money!

Elise stops, faces Tanya, looks over her shoulder at Deputy Brad Cherry waiting at the other end of the drain pipe.

Tanya turns, spots Cherry walking towards her. He motions her to turn around.

CHERRY

Tanya Wood. You're under arrest. You have the right to remain silent...

TANYA

What is this?

CHERRY

You have the right to an attorney...

Tanya attempts to run but is knocked to the wet ground by Elise who is hopping mad.

ELISE

Keep your ass down!

Cherry rolls Tanya over and cuffs her. He pulls her from the ground as all three head out of the drain pipe.

CHERRY

If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed to you by the court.

EXT. AVERY BROWN'S HOUSE - NIGHT

Cherry and his Deputy cuff and read Avery his rights as his wife Linda watches from the garage, crying.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

Deputy Cherry tested Mister Brown's snow boots against the prints found at the scene. They were an exact match. Surprise, surprise.

EXT. ALAN WOOD'S FARM HOUSE - DAY

Cherry and Deputy approach Alan Wood as he chops some firelogs in the backyard.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

Elise came clean about her relationship with Pastor Birdsall. As for Tanya... she gave up her father in exchange for six months probation and thirty days in a rehab center. Her lawyer blamed a heavy drug habit and tough upbringing on her behavior. The judge was lenient.

The Deputy cuffs Wood as the three head for the front yard.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

After all that's happened, Tanya gets off, scott free. Even named her old man as the mastermind of the whole operation. But as far as I was concerned, Avery Brown got what he deserved. There was no way Tanya or Elise could've ever guessed or imagined what would happen to Pastor Birdsall.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

If they did, they would've never gone through with it. At least that's what I choose to believe.

INT. NEWS ROOM - BREAK ROOM - MORNING

Gillian pours some sugar and creamer into her morning coffee as she zones out, stares at the wall in a stupor.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

Yet, there's still a part of me that wants justice. That can't shake that dark night, or those horrible images I can't seem to erase from my mind.

INT. NEWS ROOM - MORNING

Gillian, coffee in hand, walks toward her desk, in deep thought and oblivious to the crowds of people watching her from their cubicles and desks. Some are angry, some sympathetic, while others simply shake their heads.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

I know that those memories will become a part of me. A constant reminder of his sacrifice. A reminder of our responsibilities as journalists. To get it right.

Gillian cracks a small smile. She bucks up, ready to start a new day.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

It was just like Deputy Cherry said. We weren't just reporting the news. We were changing lives.

Gillian reaches her desk as she notices her phone is blowing up with messages. Jack passes by. Stops.

JACK

GG. Freddy's office.

Jack walks off. Gillian is confused.

INT. FREDDY'S OFFICE - MORNING

Gillian knocks and enters. Freddy is busy at her desk reading a rough draft of Gillian's latest story.

GILLIAN

Freddy. You wanted to see me?

Freddy finishes the article. Has a good laugh.

FREDDY

You know, everytime I think you're ready for the door, you go and surprise all of us, GG.

Freddy lays the article down and walks to Gillian.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

Here we are facing the embarrassment of an ugly retraction. After basically ruining the reputation and integrity of one of the finest men this town has ever known.

Gillian hangs her head low.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

And somehow we still managed to come out on top.

(beat)

This is solid work, Gillian.

Gillian slowly raises her head.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

I could fire you, but I couldn't bare losing you to the competition.

Gillian laughs.

GILLIAN

Thank you.

FREDDY

You wanna know what the number one question in the country is, GG?

GILLIAN

What's that?

FREDDY

Where's Bob Birdsall?

Freddy grabs a stack of newspapers from a chair. She hands one after the next to Gillian who reads the headlines.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

His wife has been calling his cell all morning telling him it's okay to come home. That Brown confessed and that the whole thing was caught on tape. Still no answer.

Gillian grows worried.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

It got me thinking. Maybe there's more to this story than Avery Brown.

Gillian perks up.

GILLIAN

You think so?

FREDDY

You don't pick up and leave your wife and kids with no explanation unless you're guilty of something. Am I right?

GILLIAN

Guilty of what exactly?

FREDDY

I'm thinking...he may not have molested those girls but somebody had to be in charge of seeing that money go to Alan Wood's pocket.

Gillian ponders this.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

He knew the cops would eventually trace the money back to him, so he fled. Got scared and skipped town.

Gillian nods as she thinks it over.

GILLIAN

Too bad we can't ask him ourselves.

FREDDY

Let me ask your opinion on something, GG.
(beat)

What do you think the odds are that Tanya
Wood and Elise Dobbs know the answer?

Gillian grows nervous.

GILLIAN

Elise?

FREDDY

She was shackled up in a motel with him and
four hundred dollars cash. I still can't
help but find that interesting.

Gillian pauses. She comes around.

GILLIAN

I don't know. I suppose I could ask her.

Freddy picks up Gillian's article from her desk and takes a
quick look.

FREDDY

How about this source of yours? The one who
blew the lid on Tanya?

GILLIAN

My source?

FREDDY

Maybe they know where this money trail
starts and ends.

Gillian grows more and more nervous. Freddy thinks it all over.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

Tell you what. Why don't you get down there
today and find out who's in charge of the
money. Could be they're still hiding
something.

GILLIAN

We already know that. Avery Brown was head
deacon and head of the budget committee.

Freddy shakes her head "no".

FREDDY

Too risky. Someone else was taking that money out and cleaning it before anyone could ask questions.

(beat)

My gut says Birdsall.

Gillian begins to sweat. She removes her glasses and wipes her eyes clean.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

What's the problem? You look sick.

RANDI (O.S.)

She's right, GG.

Gillian turns, spots Jack walk through the door with none other than RANDI JONES, bruised up, arm in sling. Randi is ear to ear smiles as she stares down Gillian.

RANDI

You're looking a bit pale.

GILLIAN

Randi. What the hell is she doing here?

JACK

You tell us. Or maybe you haven't heard.

GILLIAN

Heard what?

JACK

After your friend, Deputy Harley took Tanya Wood's statement, he drank himself into a stupor and threatened to kill himself.

Gillian checks with Freddy who is watching her like a hawk. A truly nasty stare.

JACK (CONT'D)

He says he just couldn't take the guilt any longer.

Cherry walks in, takes a passive role in the corner.

Gillian spots him.

GILLIAN

Brad?

Cherry ignores her. Eyes forward.

FREDDY

(to Cherry)

Deputy. Good morning.

CHERRY

Good morning.

Gillian's eyes twitch. Her lips quiver. She's falling apart and it shows.

JACK

You see, he thought Birdsall was the ugly rapist they said he was. So he didn't blink twice about robbing the church blind with his buddy Mister Wood.

RANDI

They lied to him. Just like they lied to you, GG.

Gillian turns to all of them. All eyes on her.

GILLIAN

What did he...say exactly?

FREDDY

He said to tell Birdsall's family he was sorry.

Gillian tears up. She loses it. Freddy slowly approaches her and grabs her arms.

FREDDY (CONT'D)

What happened, GG? The truth this time.

Gillian stares down Randi.

GILLIAN

Not until she confesses. To all of it.

Freddy backs off.

FREDDY

Okay, GG. What do you wanna know?

GILLIAN

(to Randi)

Avery drove you off the road and you didn't say anything.

RANDI

That's right. I didn't.

GILLIAN

(to all)

She didn't say anything because she was one of them. She was robbing the church just like Tanya and Alan Wood.

Randi nods in agreement as she slowly paces the room.

RANDI

That's one possibility.

She stops, stares down Gillian with a disgusted look.

RANDI (CONT'D)

Or maybe it was because I didn't want him arrested on a hit and run before we could catch him on camera bribing an investigative reporter.

Gillian squints. Totally confused.

GILLIAN

What?

FREDDY

That's right, GG. Randi was on assignment. When Elise told her all about Tanya and her father shaking down Avery Brown, she decided there was one sure way of finding out if Elise's story was true.

GILLIAN

But...I saw the recording. You and Mister Brown. Mister Wood showed me.

RANDI

Elise was my cameraman.

Gillian shakes her head as the truth becomes too much for her to grasp all at once.

RANDI (CONT'D)

I needed to gain her trust in order to get close to Avery Brown. When she found out I was doing a story with no intentions of giving her a dime of that money, she sold a copy of the video to Alan Wood.

FREDDY

I know. Unbelievable, right? You can't trust anybody.

Freddy slumps down in a leather chair, takes a load off as the others continue.

RANDI

Wood promises her a nice chunk of change for her troubles and she never sees a dime. End of story.

Jack approaches Gillian.

JACK

You wanna know what the difference is between you and Randi, GG?

Gillian hangs her head, in tears. She slowly looks up.

JACK (CONT'D)

Everything.

EXT. DEEP WOODS - DAY

A couple of deputies use shovels to dig up the remains of Bob Birdsall from the ground. Hovering over the deep grave are Cherry and a handcuffed Gillian.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

There you have it. I finally have my name in the headlines. Although things didn't exactly turn out how I had first imagined.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

But you know what they say. Sometimes fame
has a price...

One of the deputies discovers a white hand protruding from the
soft dirt.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

For me, that price was human decency. A
good man deprived of the dignity he so
rightfully deserved. The proper burial
his family demanded. And the people of
this city deprived of the truth.

The Deputy shares a look with Cherry who gives him the nod to
pull the body from the grave.

GILLIAN (V.O.)

For the citizens of Cobb County, things
would never be the same. And the name
Gillian Grey would never be forgotten.

Gillian's eyes dance, oblivious to the dead body in the grave
below her. She stares straight into the camera. An evil grin
slowly begins to form as we --

CUT TO BLACK

THE END